

# Ultimate Patagonia: Pumas, Glaciers, Birds & More with Naturalist Journeys



**Oct. 20 – Nov. 3, 2023**

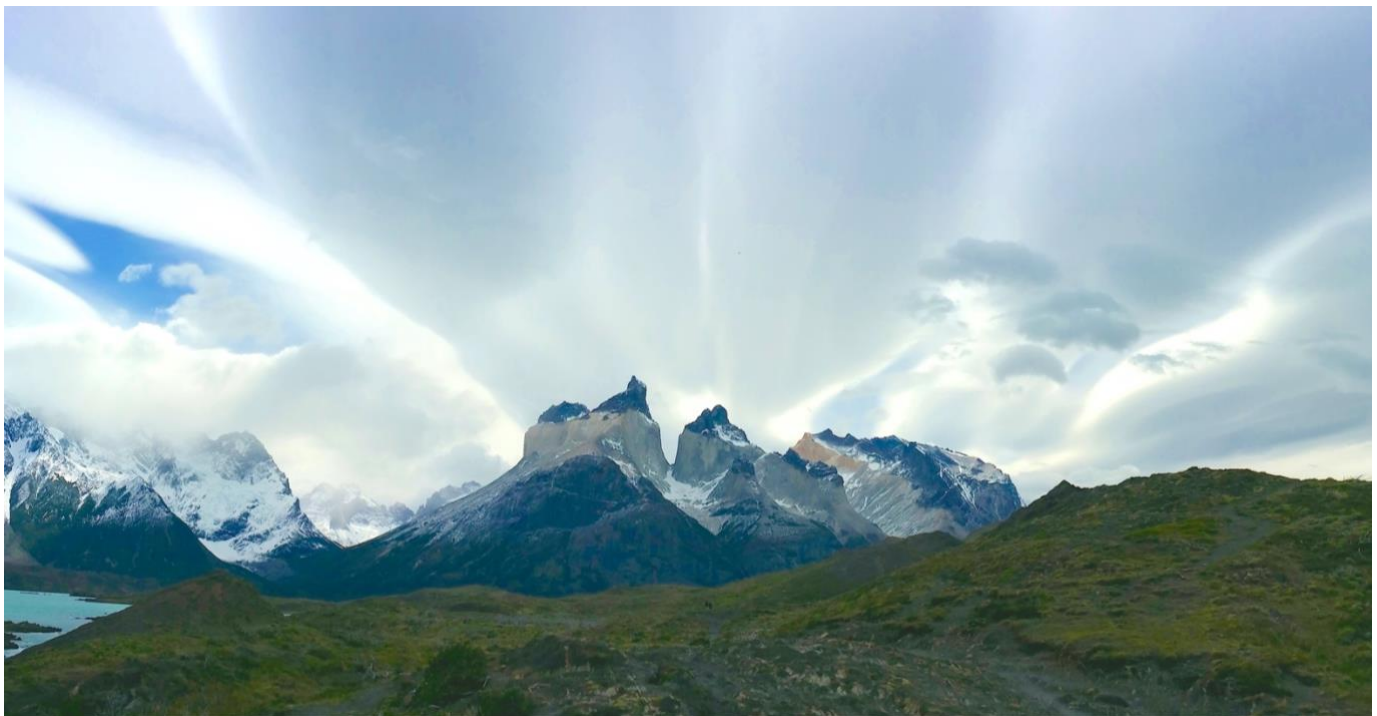
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## Both Sides of the Southern End of the World—Argentina & Chile

Famous for its varied and dramatic landscapes, Patagonian Argentina and Chile span across an ever-changing scenery: snow-capped Andean peaks towering over windswept grasslands, mountain glaciers, temperate forests of Southern Beech, and rich cold waters teeming with life.

Due to this variety of habitats and relative isolation from tropical South America, the region is rich with birds found nowhere else in the world. This is an opportunity to experience a different South America: a land full of exotic waterfowl such as Black-necked Swan, Chiloe Wigeon, Red Shoveler, Spectacled Duck, Great Grebe, and White-tufted Grebe; a land of giant Magellanic Woodpeckers and crossbill-like Slender-billed Parakeet; a land where Andean Condors soar high overhead and ostrich-like Lesser Rhea roam the grasslands. The relatively undeveloped nature of the region also means there are plenty of large mammals, including perhaps the best sites in the world to see Puma in the wild.

In addition to our exploration of the natural history of the region, we will also have opportunities to sample its pastoral cuisine and learn about explorers such as Ferdinand Magellan who passed through the region. Join us on this tour to Patagonia and enjoy this splendid palette of wildlife set among landscapes that grip the imagination with an awesome sense of geologic time and place.

### Tour Highlights

- Take a boat ride off the Valdes Peninsula to see Southern Right Whales, a conservation success story
- Visit a Magellanic Penguin colony off the coast of Chile, containing thousands upon thousands of individuals
- Marvel at the beautiful and normally elusive Puma (Mountain Lion) near Torres del Paine National Park, perhaps even hunting a Guanaco!
- Observe Andean Condor soaring overhead at the Farm of Olga Teresa in southern Chile
- Admire the grand landscapes and dramatic panoramas of Torres del Paine National Park, arguably one of the finest in the world
- Seek the gigantic Magellanic Woodpecker, the largest woodpecker species in the Americas

### Tour Summary

15-Day / 14-Night Patagonia Birding & Nature Tour

\$9,590 DBL / \$10,580 SGL, from Buenos Aires

Arrival Airport is Buenos Aires International (EZE), Departure Airport is Santiago (SCL)

## Day-to-Day Itinerary

### Fri., Oct. 20 Buenos Aires | Costanera Sur

Welcome to Buenos Aires! Upon arrival, you will meet our local agent and be transferred to the hotel. Please note, rooms are not typically available until mid-day, so if you want a room immediately for an early morning arrival, you will need to request a night ahead (additional charge at the going room rate) to get in ahead of mid-day check-in.

This afternoon, we explore Costanera Sur Nature Reserve where we find many species of the Rio de la Plata estuary of Argentina, a region not visited on other parts of our tour. Over 300 species have been recorded at this

reserve near the heart of bustling Buenos Aires! Although we do not hope to see anywhere near that many on a brief visit, we do hope to see some of the following iconic species: Black-necked Swan, Coscoroba Swan, Southern Screamer, Great Grebe, Giant Wood-Rail, Many-colored Rush-Tyrant, Spectacled Tyrant, Scarlet-headed Blackbird and Red-crested Cardinal, just to name a few.

Enjoy a welcome dinner with a chance to get to know your guides and travel companions.

*Accommodations at the Buenos Aires Hotel Awa (L,D)*

## **Sat., Oct. 21    Trelew | Northern Patagonia at Puerto Pirámides**

Argentina is a very large country by land area (eighth in the world), but it is also a very long country from north to south, requiring several domestic flights to explore properly. Domestic flights are included in your tour price, and we reposition to Trelew this morning – the gateway to northern Patagonia. We are now officially in Patagonia!

From the airport, we drive out to Puerto Pirámides, a tiny town of approximately 500 people on the Peninsula Valdes. Only a thin strip of land connects the peninsula to the mainland. The climate here is quite dry and windswept, with a predominance of succulent or leathery leaved vegetation. In fact, the peninsula shares many plant genera with the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts of the USA. We make several birding stops en route in this arid landscape, searching for specialties such as Carbonated Sierra-Finch, Patagonian Mockingbird, White-throated Cacholote, and Rusty-backed Monjita. We might also get to see Guanaco, the largest of South America's wild camelids.

Once in town, we walk a short distance to a viewpoint to see our first Southern Right Whales before dinner. Colorful murals line the walls of the Avenue of Whales. A whale tail sculpture marks the city center. This population is actually on the rise, a significant conservation achievement. They are often quite active, and we may see them breaching.

*Accommodations at the Del Nomande Eco Hotel, Puerto Piramides (B,L,D)*

## **Sun., Oct. 22    Valdes Peninsula | Punta Norte**

The sandy playas and blue bays of the peninsula are home to a fantastic concentration of mammals. Here, Southern Sea Lions breed by the thousands. We spend some time near town, exploring a short road leading towards a viewpoint with a Southern Sea Lion colony. These massive marine mammals display a range of behaviors around the antics of the dominant males. Vocal, and at times aggressive, we train our scopes on them for a better view. We also have chances for finding some specialty birds such as Gray-bellied Shrike-Tyrant and Gray-hooded Sierra-Finch.

Then, we will drive towards our next stop, Punta Norte. Along the road we will have chances for finding Chilla (fox), Guanaco, Lesser Rhea, Patagonian Mara, and two species of armadillos: Large Hairy Armadillo and Pichi.

*Accommodations at the Del Nomande Eco Hotel, Puerto Piramides (B,L,D)*

## **Mon., Oct. 23    Valdes Peninsula | Punta Delgada**

A great day that will combine a variety of wildlife. Guanacos and Maras (or Patagonian Cavy) are possible along the road, providing great opportunities to photograph them. By mid-morning at Punta Delgada Lighthouse, we visit the only mainland Southern Elephant Seal colony, by far the largest pinniped in the world. To give you an idea of their great size, they are more than twice as heavy as a male Walrus and 6-7 times heavier than a Polar Bear!

Birdlife in the area includes Southern Giant-Petrel, Magellanic Cormorant, Chimango Caracara, Blackish Oystercatcher, and Magellanic Penguin.

In the afternoon and weather permitting, we hope to take a boat excursion to get close views of Southern Right Whale. Getting close to these massive giants, enough to see their blows, study their flukes, and observe their behaviors, is memorable!

*Accommodations at the Del Nomande Eco Hotel, Puerto Piramides (B,L,D)*

## **Tues., Oct. 24 Punto Tombo Penguin Colony | Chubut Valley**

Our main destination today will be Punta Tombo, a narrow peninsula about two hours south of the city of Trelew. Punta Tombo is the breeding site of a colony of nearly one and a half million Magellanic Penguins. You will be able to walk through the colony area, watch them waddle between bushes where they seek shade and shelter, and be able to watch them swim and enter and exit the sea – truly wonderful views. Other species frequently seen include: Elegant Crested-Tinamou, White-headed Steamer-Duck, Great Grebe, Dolphin Gull, Long-tailed Meadowlark, and Common Diuca-Finch.

In the afternoon, we devote our time to explore the Chubut River Valley or perhaps the Laguna del Ornitólogo in order to see Burrowing Parrot, Chilean Flamingo, Red Shoveler, Chiloe Wigeon, White-tufted Grebe, and other classic species of southern Argentina.

*Accommodations at the Hotel Libertador, Trelew (B,L,D)*

## **Wed., Oct. 25 Trelew | Argentina to Ushuaia**

After breakfast, we have the option of revisiting Laguna del Ornitólogo for some additional birding. However, we leave mid-morning from Trelew on a flight to Ushuaia at the southern tip of South America, the gateway to Tierra del Fuego National Park. This is a modern city now, with a scenic waterfront lined by shops and a backdrop of snow-capped mountains.

After settling in this afternoon at our new lodge, we can explore the surrounding area which tends to be very birdy! A small river estuary within sight of the dining area of the lodge usually has a collection of waterfowl and gulls loafing about, including Ashy-headed Goose, Flying Steamer-Duck, Crested Duck, Yellow-billed Pintail, and Dolphin Gull. A falling tide usually attracts Baird's Sandpiper and Austral Negrillo, while the *Nothofagus* forest behind the lodge is home to all the landbirds possible to see in Tierra del Fuego from Thorn-tailed Rayadito to Magellanic Woodpecker.

If the weather is mild, we also have the option to explore Glaciar Martial in order to see White-bellied Seedsnipe, Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant, and (with luck) Yellow-bridled Finch.

There are many good restaurants to choose from here, and we will select one to enjoy our dinner tonight.

*Accommodations at Hotel Tolkeyen, Ushuaia (B,L,D)*

## **Thurs., Oct. 26 Ushuaia: Tierra del Fuego NP | Beagle Channel by Catamaran**

Tierra del Fuego National Park showcases southern temperate rainforest, much like our Olympic National Park (which shows off northern temperate rainforest) in feel. We will explore some of the trails it offers and visit the dense *Nothofagus* forest. These relatively quiet forests have relatively few bird species, but those that are here are very special. Magellanic Woodpecker, a close relative to the now extinct Ivory-billed Woodpecker, is the

largest woodpecker species in the Americas. Austral Parakeet, Austral Blackbird, Thorn-tailed Rayadito, and White-throated Treerunner also make their home here.

After lunch, we will get onboard a catamaran and have unparalleled views of the Beagle Channel and the southern end of Tierra del Fuego. Tall, windswept mountains tower on either side of this deep channel, creating an incredible panorama. Bundled up with the wind in our hair, we will be looking for Black-browed Albatrosses, Blackish Cinclodes, Snowy Sheathbill, Southern Fulmar, Chilean Skua, and more.

*Accommodations at Hotel Tolkeyen, Ushuaia (B,L,D)*

### **Fri., Oct. 27 Flight to Calafate | Drive to Cerro Castillo | Puma Country**

The next leg of our journey is a flight south to El Calafate. After arriving, we will spend some time near town visiting the Laguna Nimez area. This lush wetland is an oasis in arid Patagonia, and we hope to find a variety of South American waterfowl, Plumbeous Rail, South American Tern, Cinereous Harrier, Wren-like Rushbird, Yellow-winged Blackbird, Gray-hooded Sierra-Finch, and more. We also have a chance to see highly unique Magellanic Plover, a delight for birders and nature photographers alike.

We then drive into the mountains, crossing into Chile. We have chances to observe wild Guanaco, Andean Condor, and Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle. Once we reach the border, we get the stamp for Chile then immediately arrive to Cerro Castillo and our hotel in this little town.

*Accommodations in Hotel Estancia el Ovejero, Patagonico (B,L,D)*

### **Sat., Oct. 28 Full Day Searching for Pumas in the Wild**

We will have an early start this morning. At 4:15 a.m. we will drive from the hotel to the Sarmiento area where we will visit Laguna Amarga farm, which is the best place to see Puma. Upon arrival, our trackers will be waiting there for us, and from here we will look for these amazing cats. Pumas normally start early in the morning for hunting time. Guanaco is their main prey, so hopefully we will witness this moment. We will spend at least 3 hours out on the farm, and then afterwards return to the hotel, rest, and eat lunch.

In the afternoon, we will search again for Pumas. At this time of day, they like to relax and lay down for long periods of time, great opportunities for photographs! This experience with Pumas is a wild cat fan's dream! Following this, we will return to hotel for dinner.

*Accommodations in Hotel Estancia el Ovejero, Patagonico (B,L,D)*

### **Sun., Oct. 29 & Mon., Oct. 30 Chile's Torres del Paine National Park**

Today, we will visit Torres del Paine National Park – a highlight of our route in southern South America. Arguably one of the finest national parks in the world, it offers rugged mountains, massive glaciers, extensive Patagonian forests, and a bevy of lovely water features (waterfalls, gurgling streams, quiet ponds) – all within sight of the spectacular Torres del Paine (literally, the “Blue Towers”). *Paine* means “blue” in the native Tehuelche language, the original inhabitants of the region. We spend two nights in this land of grand landscapes and dramatic panoramas, which are also rich in wildlife.

Guanaco, Lesser Rhea, and Chilean Flamingo are common residents. The splendid Paine Massif will be visible at most times, and we traverse the park on spectacular internal roads with stunning views and great places to stop en route.

Lagoons and coastal areas here are home to a variety of South American waterfowl, including the elegant Black-necked Swan, unusual Spectacled Duck, and bulky Flying Steamer-Duck. White-tufted, Great, and Silvery Grebe

also nest in these lagoons, amassing island mounds of floating vegetation as their nest. In the windswept grasslands, Black-faced Ibis, Cinereous Harrier, and White-throated Caracara join Lesser Rhea. The cool temperate forests are home to the impressive Magellanic Woodpecker, Austral Parakeet, Magellanic Tapaculo, Tufted Tit-Tyrant, Fire-eyed Diucon, and more. Among the mammals, we can expect Culpeo (fox), herds of Guanaco, Large Hairy Armadillo, and maybe Huemul Deer (Endangered).

*Accommodations for two nights at Hotel del Paine, Rio Serrano (B,L,D)*

## **Tues., Oct. 31 Baguales | Torres del Paine | Puerto Natales**

We have the full morning for wildlife viewing in the Sierra Baguales, trying to obtain better views of birds and other wildlife or having some new sightings of things we may have missed – perhaps Least or Gray-breasted Seedsnipe, Andean Condor, and Cinnamon-bellied Ground-Tyrant. We then start our way to over to the coast. Just a short drive away is a scenic town, Puerto Natales, where we stay the night.

Founded in 1911 as a port for the sheep industry, we have a chance to enjoy this charming town this afternoon, where we have time to walk the picturesque waterfront area with elegant Black-necked Swans and other waterbirds adding to the atmosphere of the place. In the evening, we will enjoy a delicious local meal. Mountains frame the waterfront view, and a dock jutting out into the sea lets us get close to many species.

*Accommodations at Casa de Patagonia, Puerto Natales (B,L,D)*

## **Wed., Nov. 1 Olga Teresa Farm | Andean Condors & More | Punta Arenas**

Today, we will leave from Puerto Natales to make our way to Punta Arenas, but we will definitely make a stop at one of the most impressive places to see Andean Condors in the world. Here, there is a huge ridge where Condors roost. When wind currents are good enough, they come and soar around. We will bring a box lunch and enjoy a picnic here among the condors. After lunch, we will continue our driving time to Punta Arenas and will check in at Hotel Diego de Almagro, and enjoy dinner paired with some local beer.

*Accommodations at Hotel Diego de Almagro (B,L,D)*

## **Thurs., Nov. 2 Isla Magdalena**

We have an early departure this morning for a boat ride to Isla Magdalena, one of the biggest and most impressive Magellanic Penguin colonies in the world, with numbers in the hundreds of thousands. We should also see Kelp Gull, Dolphin Gull, South American Tern, Blackish Oystercatcher, and Chilean Skua among other species. We may also see Chilean Dolphin and South American Fur Seal.

After a return from our boat ride, we can take a break, or if we like, visit the local Nao Victoria Museum. This museum exhibits a full-size replica of the first ship to ever circumnavigate the world: Ferdinand Magellan's *Nao Victoria*.

Tonight is our farewell dinner. We get to recount our many fine adventures and tally our final species list.

*Accommodations at Hotel Diego de Almagro (B,L,D)*

## **Fri., Nov. 3 Flight to Santiago**

Our incredible Ultimate Patagonia trip comes to an end, it is time to start the trip home. We will match the in-country flight segment today for international departures from Santiago. (B)

## **Tour Details**

## Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Offset your carbon footprint on one of the many online programs available.

## Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$9,590 DBL / \$10,580 SGL** based on double occupancy, from Buenos Aires, Argentina. This cost includes: accommodations for 14 nights, meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner), land transportation during the journeys, and four internal flights: Buenos Aires to Trelew, Trelew to Ushuaia, Ushuaia to Calafate, Punta Arenas to Santiago.

Tour price does not include: Airfare to Buenos Aires and from Santiago not included, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, portorage, telephone charges, or alcoholic beverages. Gratuities for maids or porters, and other hotel staff, as well as your guides are not included but are appreciated.

## Travel Information

The arrival airport for this tour is Buenos Aires International (EZE). The departure airport is Santiago (SCL). Please plan to arrive in Buenos Aires at your leisure on October 20. Please do keep in mind that hotel check in is typically after mid-day. Please plan to depart in the late afternoon/evening from Santiago (SCL) on November 3, allowing time to connect by air from Punta Arenas. We have an experienced travel agent who is happy to help you make your flights. Please ask for her details and we'll connect you!

## Photo Credits

Puma, courtesy of Neblina Forest; Cuernos del Paine, Greg Smith (GS); Brown Skua, GS; Magellanic Penguins, Peg Abbott (PA); Tawny-necked Dottrel, GS.

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